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DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination).

On 16 April 1992, Mr. Djibril Diallo, Chief, Public Participation Section, Division of Public Affairs, United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF); Mr. Chip Lyons, Director of Communications, U.S. Committee for UNICEF; and Ms. Bennie Wynn, Deputy Executive Director of The Third World Trade Institute, New York, briefed NGO representatives on the Day Of The African Child (16 June).

Mr. Diallo opened by asking the audience to remember with a minute of silence the 10,000 children who die every day in Africa. He urged the world to form a human chain to ensure the protection, survival, and development of the children of Africa.

The efforts of voluntary organizations are particularly important in Africa because they reach the most remote areas, he said. He illustrated challenges Africa faces with the following figures: by the end of the 20th century, 10 million children will be orphaned by the AIDS virus in Africa; three million African women have been infected by the AIDS virus already; 27 million Africans are threatened by drought and famine; 40 million are currently displaced by wars and environmental degradation; every year Africa spends US$25 billion to service the US$150 billion external debt. Mr. Diallo added that children are the hardest hit by this alarming situation.

Mr. Diallo said that the situation in Africa is a challenge, but not without hope. He gave the example of a little African street girl, Salamawit, who at a meeting in 1988 urged 30 presidents and prime ministers to help her people survive. Today she is attending secondary school and is a symbol of survival.

Speaking of NGO achievements in Africa, Mr. Diallo noted that Junior Chamber International expanded the use of oral rehydration therapy in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency brought food and water to hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in 1989. NGOs have been instrumental in helping Africa undertake successful health initiatives. One of the greatest achievements is the Universal Child Immunization which protects children against the six deadly diseases of tuberculosis, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and polio.

The Rights of the child

African governments are showing a new fervor in their protection of children's rights, Mr. Diallo said. They are strongly endorsing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pertinent initiatives include the 1979 Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, the 1989 Declaration that 1990 should be the decade for the survival, protection and development of the African child, and the drafting and adoption by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

In outlining the goals set up by the World Summit for Children in September 1990, Mr. Diallo said its main purpose was to invest in people in order to bring an end to the tragedies facing children. The Organization of African Unity followed up the World Summit decisions by urging each African country to give priority to children by devoting a large part of their resources to programmes for women and children. According to Mr. Diallo Africa needs US$30 billion to achieve its goals by the year 2000. US$15 billion should be provided by the Africans, and the other half by the international community. UNICEF and OAU are planning a conference in Senegal to facilitate dialogue between Africa and the international community, Mr. Diallo said. He expressed his hope that the necessary US$30 billion be raised as a result of the conference.

In conclusion, Mr. Diallo said that every African country should view 16 June, The Day of The African Child, as an encouragement to prepare its own national programme of action. He urged NGOs to do the same.

The U.S. Committee for UNICEF

Mr. Lyons said that Africa is a priority area for the U.S. Committee for UNICEF. Being a public affairs and fund-raising organization, the Committee put an emphasis on Africa by raising funds, making education material available to the public, and directing a major portion of its funds to African survival and development. He said the Committee assumes the role of provocateur to inspire people and NGOs to use the Day of the African Child to: 1) celebrate the African continent; 2) inform themselves about the continent; 3) use the opportunity to publicize the day; 4) capture the media's interest in the day, and; 5) encourage organizations to participate in fund-raising.

The U.S. Committee for UNICEF works closely with the African-American Institute in preparations for 16 June-related events each year. The Institute, in cooperation with various media, is planning a whole week of educational activities. Africare has for the last 18 months been organizing a strong political constituency for Africa.

In its efforts to enhance awareness in the United States of the Day of the African Child, the U.S. Committee for UNICEF has sent an information kit to some 800 groups, including churches and schools.

The Day Of The African Child schedule

Ms. Wynn provided highlights from the New York programme related to the Day of the African Child:

* The African Film Festival is to be held 9 through 16 June, at the Schomberg Centre, the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building and at the UN Dag Hammarskjöld auditorium. The films are directed by well-known Africans and African-Americans.

* On 10 June, the Africa's Future award will be presented to a prominent African-American.

* On 12 June, a discussion and lecture is scheduled in the UNICEF house.

* On 14 June, African foods and artifacts will be presented at a Bazaar to be held on the grounds of Columbia University. A fashion show is scheduled for the afternoon.

* On 16 June, religious leaders of the Harlem community will offer prayers and conduct special collections for the support of the Day of the African Child. The United Nations hosts a special programme at Headquarters.

* On 22 June, a reception will be held in the art gallery of the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building.

Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder, Isaiah Thomas, and Michael Jordan are among the personalities who will lend their names and prominence to the Day of the African Child events.

The Harlem Task Force cooperates with UNICEF in developing a strategy to reach the mass media with special articles, television and radio programmes and talk shows.

Members of the Harlem Task Force are scheduled to appear on the WLIB talk show to present the Day of the African Child and the special programmes planned for Harlem. In addition, flyers and posters are distributed throughout the community in order to increase the public awareness of this annual celebration, and encourage attendance.